

Private members' bill a sham

Liberals ask when MUN presidential search will resume

By DAVE BARTLETT

THE TELEGRAM

When will the search for a new Memorial University president resume?

That's what Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones wanted to know during question period in the House of Assembly Wednesday.

Education Minister Joan Burke was widely criticized this summer after she admitted to interviewing and rejecting two candidates for the post, including Eddy Campbell.

Campbell is the acting president of MUN and has been since former president Axel Meisen resigned at the end of 2007.

Burke told the House that she's recently met with the new chairman of MUN's board of regents — St. John's lawyer Bob Simmonds — and she hopes the search will resume soon.

Jones asked Burke if she will accept recommendations forthcoming from

an ad hoc committee of the board.

"Will you be listening to the recommendations that will come forward from this committee and are you prepared to look at legislative changes (to strengthen MUN's autonomy) if that's what they require?" she asked.

Burke said she welcomes the report and will see what it has to say.

The questions came on the day the parliamentary secretary to the minister of education, Darin King, introduced a private members motion to affirm the House's "full support for the academic freedom and academic autonomy of Memorial University."

When the private members bills came up for debate, Jones called it an apology motion.

She accused Burke of sticking her fingers where they didn't belong and said, "government likes to confuse accountability with autonomy."

She pointed out government appoints 16 members of the 25-member board, including its chair, which

makes the school accountable.

In a news release, Liberal education critic Roland Butler called the private members' bill a sham. "Instead of enhancing the autonomy of Memorial University, the motion would support the continuation of government interference in the appointment of a new president," he said. Butler said he's shocked the government still maintains they have a right to hand pick a new president.

Butler asked that the motion be amended to include changes to the MUN Act which would "restrict government interference."

That amendment, as well as an NDP amendment that the House affirmed "support for the academic freedom and institutional autonomy of Memorial University," were both defeated.

The private members' motion passed as written.